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No. 80

A Clerical Error

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

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A Comedy in One Act

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

AUTHOR OF

"The Manœuvres of Jane," "The Liars," "The Middleman,"
"Case of Rebellious Susan," "The Physician," etc., etc.



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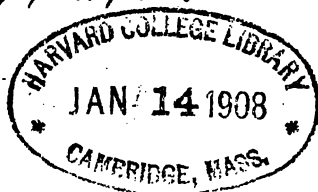
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A CLERICAL ERROR

Produced at the Court Theatre, London, on October 18th,
1879, with the following cast:—

THE REVEREND RICHARD CAPEL (a country vicar).

MR. WILSON BARRETT

DICK CAPEL (his nephew, an architect).

MR. ARTHUR DACRE

JEREMIAH PERRY (the vicar's butler).

MR. G. W. ANSON

MINNIE HERITAGE (the vicar's ward).

MISS WINIFRED EMERY

Time, the present.

PERSONS REPRESENTED

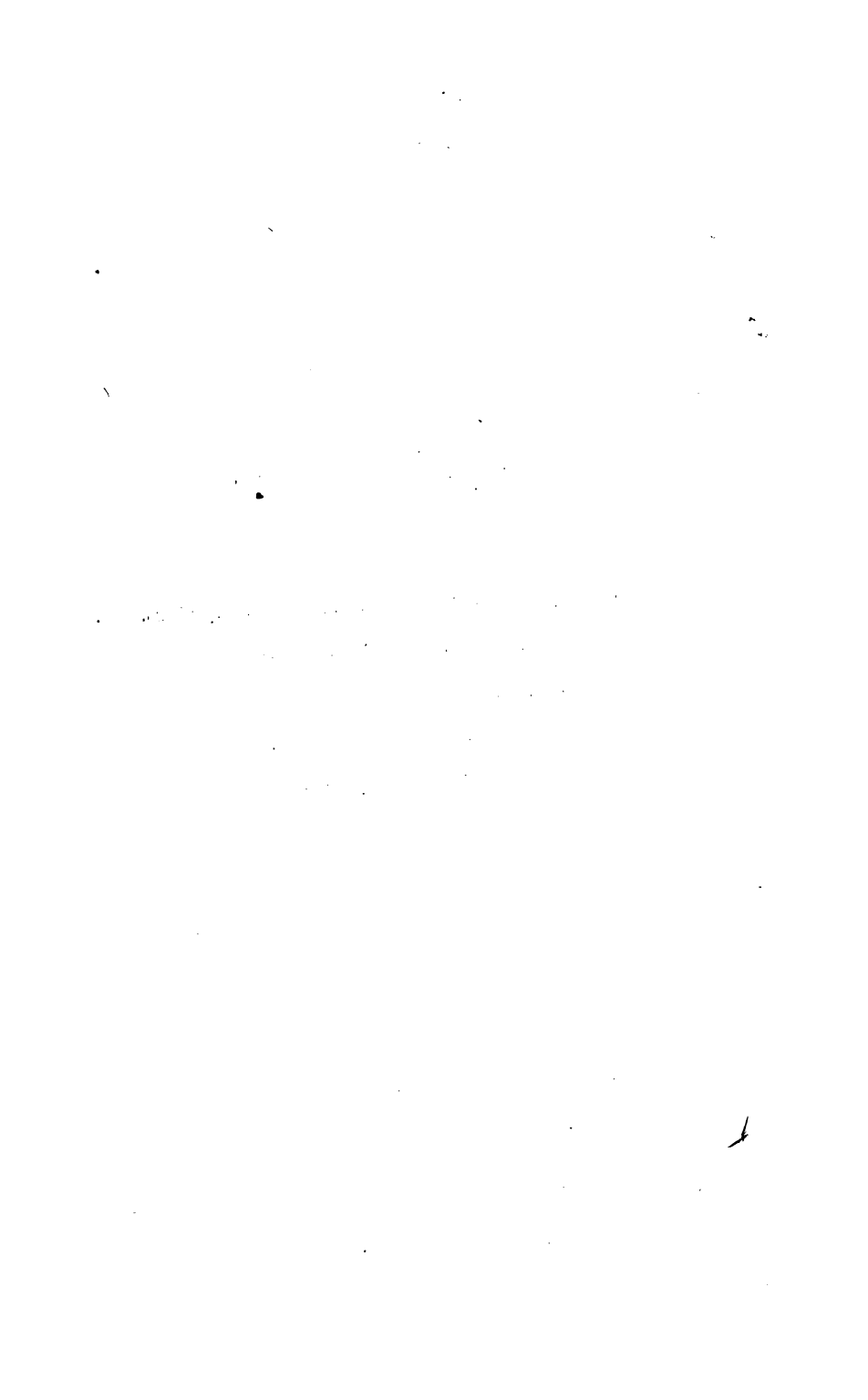
THE REVEREND RICHARD CAPEL (a country vicar).

DICK CAPEL (his nephew, an architect).

JEREMIAH PERRY (the vicar's butler).

MINNIE HERITAGE (the vicar's ward).

Time, the present.



A CLERICAL ERROR

SCENE.—*The Vicarage parlour, a sombre comfortable room—old-fashioned substantial furniture, well-worn comfortable easy chair, sofa, etc.—window at back showing country scenery—door in flat opening upon lawn—door left—door right leading into butler's pantry.*

Enter from door right Jeremiah Perry, a sour ancient individual, with red nose and starchy forbidding mien—he has a very mouldy bottle of port in his hand, and a glass; he handles the bottle with extreme tenderness, keeping it almost horizontal.

PERRY (*taking out a pocket corkscrew and drawing the cork with the utmost tenderness so as not to disturb the crust*). “And, Perry,” he says, “take a bottle of ‘forty-seving’ down to old Granny Lomath (*imitating the Vicar*) and mind it is ‘forty-seving’—she’s had a bad cold, and it’ll warm up the cockles of her old heart,” (*pouring out a glass*). Now that’s what I call a casting o’ pearls before swine (*drinking*); and what comes of it? Why, in course, when they gets sich stuff as this in their insides, they can’t tell what’s the matter with themselves, and they goes and rushes violently down a steep place and perishes. That’s what comes of giving “forty-seving” port to mangle-women (*tenderly pouring out another glass, drinking, smacking his lips*). There’s no sense of fitness in it. But it’s jest like him. Comes home one day and sings out to me, “Perry, get me a shirt aired and bring it up to my room immediate,” he says. “Why, what have you done with your shirt?” I says. “Why,” he says, “I went into old Timothy’s cottage, and he hadn’t got a shirt, so I took off mine and gave it to him,” he says. “Now couldn’t you have waited till you got home and sent him a shirt by me in a horderly respectable way?” I says. “Ah,” he says, “but mine wass so nice and warm, you know, Perry,” he says. He calls that one of his jokes—I call it downright tomfoolery. That’s the way he goes on (*drinks*). There’s no sense of fitness in giving away a shirt like that. And this here “forty-seving” again—why, if I didn’t take care of it (*drinking*), we shouldn’t have a drop left for visitors, no, nor for ourselves nuther.

"Mind it is 'forty-seving,'" he says. "All right," I thinks. (*Goes to sideboard—takes decanter of plain water—is about to fill up the bottle—hesitates*). This here is bad stuff for mangling on—especially for constitutions as ain't used to it—"acclimatized," master calls it. Now I am "acclimatized" to it, and Granny Lomath—she ain't—and if she has it too strong she'll go and bust up that there mangle—that's what she'll do. (*Pours out another glass, drinks it—fills up bottle with pure water—carefully puts cork in*). I'll get my hat and take it down to her. (*Goes into pantry to fetch his hat—Enter from door at back Minnie, in out-door morning dress—Perry re-enters from pantry with hat.*)

MINNIE. Oh, Perry, have you seen Mr. Capel?

PERRY (*moving right to centre*). Well, I don't know, Miss, but I rayther fancy, if you want him, you'll find him at old Abelthorpe's cottage reading the *Sporting Times* to Abelthorpe.

MINNIE. The *Sporting Times*!

PERRY. You see, Miss, old Abelthorpe have been a sporting man all his life, and now he's as blind as a bat, and as deaf as a howl, and so master goes to see him now and then, reads all the sporting news to him.

MINNIE. How good of him!

PERRY. Master used to send me, but old Abelthorpe grumbled at my pronounciation and were that nasty particler over a paltry glass of beer as I happened to draw for myself by accident, as I felt obligated to resign; which it's mortal dry work reading to a deaf old idiot like Abelthorpe—Master don't mind it—he likes it.

MINNIE (*sitting herself at table, drawing off gloves*). How kind of dear old Guardy!

PERRY. There ain't no sense of fitness in it—in my opinion. Now look at this here bottle, "forty-seving" it is, and a pure wintage wine—none of them *blended doctored* stuffs as they passes off for "forty-seving." Where do you think that bottle's going?

MINNIE. To some poor creature, I dare say.

PERRY. Why, to old Granny Lomath. She's a aggravating old hypocrite, she is. I can't abear her.

MINNIE. Oh, I think she is a charming old body, a delightful old creature.

PERRY. Ah, I know her, Miss, and if there's anybody in this here parish as deserves to have their necks wrung it's old Granny Lomath. I believe there'll be some judgment on that there mangle one of these days.

MINNIE. Oh, don't say that, Perry.

PERRY. I do, Miss. And this here's the way to bring it about. "Mind it is 'forty-seving,'" he says. "All right," I thinks, but if any violent disaster happens to the clean linen

of this parish, I hope folks won't blame me. I washes my hands of it.

MINNIE. Ah, Perry, you always look on the dark side of things. You always prophesied poor Dick Capel would come to no good (*sighs*).

PERRY. And didn't my prophecies come true according? Didn't he go it to that there rampageous hextent as there was no holding of him in? Didn't Master fork out till he couldn't fork out no longer? And then didn't young Dick forge—

MINNIE. Hush, Perry! How dare you speak of it? Mr. Capel has forgiven his nephew long ago—forgiven him—and forgotten him! (*Sits pensively, looking on the ground, sighs.*)

PERRY (*aside, glancing at her*). She's drefful spoony on young Dick still; it don't matter what important subjects she and I may be a discussing of, she allays will drag his name into the course of conversation. I hate folks being spoony—there ain't no sense of fitness in it—it's puffedekly absurd. I was never spoony on nobody in my life—and nobody was never spoony on me. (*Looks towards Minnie*) Well, I think, Miss, I'll jest toddle down to Granny Lomath's with this here bottle of "forty-seving" (*Minnie still sits pensive*). I'll take my corkscrew with me and open it for her—she ain't acclimatized to opening "forty-seving" port and I am. Now where *did* I put that there corkscrew? (*makes a great show of searching for his corkscrew, which he is well aware is in his waistcoat pocket*). I suppose you haven't seen my corkscrew anywhere, have you, Miss? (*feeling in his pockets*).

MINNIE (*absently*). No, Perry—no.

PERRY. Now let me recollect—when did I have that there corkscrew last? (*pretends to consider*). You don't remember when I had my corkscrew last, do you, Miss?

MINNIE (*absently*). No, Perry—no.

PERRY. I'm almost certing I had it last night (*fumbling in his pockets*). Well now, look at that there now (*drawing it out of his waistcoat pocket in pretended triumph*). To think as that there corkscrew should have been lying in my westcot-pocket all the while. (*Glances at Minnie, who is not noticing him. Aside.*) She's drefful spoony.

Exit Perry door at back.

MINNIE. Poor Dick! I wonder what has become of him? Does he wear my portrait in his locket still? I dare say he has forgotten all about me! It's more than two years since—since that dreadful morning.—How well I remember it—and our hurried "Good-bye" in this very room. "Good-bye, Minnie," he said, "I'll never show my face in this house again till I can pay back my uncle every farthing, and till I can ask him with a clear conscience to give you to me for my wife." His wife! Dick's wife! (*toying with the pen and ink on table*). Will it ever come to pass, I wonder? I fear not (*writing*). Mrs.

Richard Capel! Mrs. Richard Capel! (*looks at it*). How nice it looks. Now in a little larger hand. (*writing, breaks off suddenly*). What a goose I am! Would anybody, to look at me, take me for such a donkey? (*tears up the paper, the pieces fall near the chair on the floor.*) Helgho! Poor Dick! He has kept his promise! We have had no news of him from that day to this. Has he gone to the dogs? Not unlikely! It's strange he has never written to his uncle! Dear old Guardy! Dick and I used to make love under his very nose, and I don't believe he ever scented what was going on!

Enter from door at back, the Reverend Richard Capel, about forty-five years of age, comfortable, brisk, chatty, jovial, hearty, nothing clerical about him except his dress. Minnie rises.

VICAR. Well, slugabed! I stole a march upon you this morning. I was at the other end of the parish I warrant before you had breakfast.

MINNIE (*effusively rushing up to him*). You dear old Guardy! (*kissing him*) I'll give you five kisses for yourself and five more for Mrs. Mummery's pig.

VICAR (*confused at her demonstrativeness, and trembling*). Five kisses for Mrs. Mummery's pig?

MINNIE (*nodding*). Five kisses for Mrs. Mummery's pig. Oh, don't pretend to be ignorant. You know very well what I mean!

VICAR. Mrs. Mummery's pig died of measles, and I told Perry to go and bury him at the end of the garden and thoroughly disinfect the pigsty.

MINNIE. And Perry said he couldn't see any sense of fitness in giving burial rites to a measly pig.

VICAR. Poor Mrs. Mummery! She was very fond of her pig. It was only a few days ago she called me in to see how fat he was getting. And now it seems she has lost him (*turning his face away from Minnie and smiling to himself*).

MINNIE. Not "lost," but "gone before"—she was going to kill him next week.

VICAR. Ah well! we're here to-day and gone to-morrow! (*smiling to himself*).

MINNIE. Oh, you impostor! But I've found you out—I've found you out!

VICAR. Found me out?

MINNIE. Confess now! Or all the parish shall ring with it. Confess!

VICAR. Confess? There shan't be any confession in this parish while I'm vicar of it!

MINNIE. But it doesn't matter. Your accomplice has betrayed you.

VICAR. What—Shadrech Tompkins?

MINNIE. Shadrech Tompkins has confessed that you told him to go to Piddington market and buy the biggest and fattest pig he could see—and bring it home after dark and put it in Mrs. Mummery's pigsty and not say a word to anybody—the biggest and fattest pig in the market!

VICAR. Well, you know, my dear, I thought I might as well go *the whole hog* while I was about it (*laughing good-temperedly over his little joke*). But it was a good joke, wasn't it, when Mrs. Mummery had been crying over her dead pig for her to come down this morning and find it alive and well?

MINNIE (*affectionately taking his hands*). You dear old Guardy! You will have your joke!

VICAR. Ah well, you know I'm an old bachelor and—

MINNIE. Old? Nonsense! Why, you're just in the prime of life.

VICAR (*rather earnestly*). You think so? (*self-complacently*). Well, I'm not so very old, am I?

MINNIE. Of course not.

VICAR (*anxiously*). Forty-five is a good well-seasoned age, isn't it.

MINNIE. I call forty-five a delightful age—the *most delightful age*—for a man.

VICAR. Well, perhaps it is.

MINNIE. It's neither too—

VICAR (*anxiously*). Old?

MINNIE. No, nor too young. It's what you may call a good middle-age.

VICAR. Yes, yes, a flourishing middle-age.

MINNIE. Rather under-done if anything.

VICAR. So it is, so it is. Rather under-done as you say. And I seem to enjoy life more and more every year.

MINNIE. Yes, and every year you get fonder of your little jokes.

VICAR (*laughing*). So I do, so I do.

MINNIE. And every year your jokes get better and better.

VICAR (*highly complimented*). So they do, so they do. That was a rare bit of fun I had with old Goggs's gig-umbrella, wasn't it?

MINNIE. Oh, delicious! How we laughed at it at Mrs. Churton's tea-party. But that wasn't all your own idea, was it?

VICAR. Oh, quite, quite!

MINNIE. I thought Georgy Roebuck helped you.

VICAR. Georgy Roebuck took off Goggs's attention, but I stole the gig-umbrella—yes, I stole the gig-umbrella! (*triumphantly*).

MINNIE. And then that old woman's sack-race at the feast. That was your suggestion, I thought I should have died with laughter!

A CLERICAL ERROR

VICAR (*laughing heartily*). Jack Seton said it was worth a thousand pounds.

MINNIE. I shall never forget it!

VICAR. Well, well, the older I get the more jokes I make. I can't help it. I believe I inherit it. My old father was a wonderful man for his joke. Aye, aye, a wonderful man for his joke!

MINNIE. Well, in my opinion, it's a great deal pleasanter to joke people into being good than to preach them into it.

VICAR. Yes, and so much easier. Now it's a fact, I could always make a good joke, but I could never preach a good sermon.

MINNIE. Oh, I think your sermons are charming.

VICAR. Do you? I've never considered sermons my strong point.

MINNIE. So pithy!

VICAR (*flattered*). Well, I always try to talk plain common-sense, and that's more than most of our parsons can say!

MINNIE. And so simple! A child can understand them!

VICAR (*highly flattered*). Well, that's true. I don't believe in using a heap of long words that nobody knows the meaning of. (*Aside.*) Dear girl! How well she understands me!

MINNIE. And so short, too! The longest of them not twenty minutes!

VICAR (*laughing*). Well, *there*, I do take some credit to myself!

MINNIE (*taking his hands again*). Indeed, you're the dearest, darlingest, delightfulest, deliciousest, and I don't know-whatest duck on the face of the earth! There, I'll give you one more kiss, and then I must run away with my foolish tongue, or else my foolish tongue will run away with me!

Runs off door left.

Vicar stands looking fondly after her for some moments.

VICAR. Dear girl! (*sighs*). Dear girl! Ah, if I could but knock twenty years off my forty-five. If I could but knock off ten, or even five,—why should I knock off any? (*seating himself in the chair where Minnie had previously been sitting*). Old Peters at Harsham was nearly sixty when he was married, and was very happy, I've always understood—till his wife ran away with the curate. And then there was the archdeacon—an old ogre of sixty-seven,—married a young girl of twenty, and what's more, had a family of six, and exercised his "arch-diaconal functions" to the last. After all, forty-five isn't such a very old age—she said it was a delightful age—the most delightful age for a man. And I feel as strong and hearty as ever I did. (*Gets up, pulls himself together, braces up his chest, hits out vigorously with his arms, marches three or four paces in good style*). There, I don't feel

a bit old—what an old fool I am! (*drops crestfallen into arm-chair again*). No! No! It can never be! She shall never know how much I love her! She shall never know that a hair of her head is dearer to me than all the world beside! (*Leans forward with hands between his knees in consideration, catches sight of the piece of paper on which Minnie had been writing*). Eh! What's this? her handwriting! (*picks it up*). Mrs. Richard Capell! (*surprised*) Mrs. Richard Capell! (*trembling with joy*) Mrs. Richard Capell! No! No! No! she can't mean it—it can't be true! it must be her fun! And yet—yet—yet—let me remember—she—she—she—hung about my neck—she wouldn't let me call myself old—she praised my sermons, and everybody knows what rubbish they are—she—she—kissed me—and here's her handwriting—her own thought—her own wish—Mrs. Richard Capell—Mrs. Richard Capell—(*kisses it greedily*). Yes, yes, it must be so, she loves me, she loves me. Oh Minnie, my darling, my wife, shall I have you after all? How can I thank you for loving an old—an old buffer like me. Oh Minnie, Minnie! (*leans back in chair and fairly sobs with joy*).

Enter Minnie, left, without her bonnet and outdoor dress.

MINNIE (*noticing his discomposure*). Why, Guardy, what's the matter? (*goes up to him, stands over him*).

VICAR (*rising, earnestly seizing her hands*). Nothing, my dear, nothing! I'm a very silly old fellow, that's all.

MINNIE. Indeed you are not.

VICAR (*trembling*). You—you can't guess what a foolish fancy has got into my head (*looking very earnestly at her*).

MINNIE. What is it?

VICAR. It's all about you, too!

MINNIE. About me? What can it be?

VICAR. No, I won't tell you—perhaps you'd feel hurt—or angry—or—or (*nervously*) perhaps you'd—you'd laugh at me! (*dropping her hands, turning away*).

MINNIE (*aside*). What can it be? (*goes to him, takes his hand—aloud to him*) Now sit down and tell me all, there's a dear, good Guardy! (*playfully pushes him into the arm-chair—kneels down beside him—twines his arm round her neck*) Now, Guardy, tell me, tell me! (*a pause—she playfully slaps his hand*) Tell me.

VICAR. I—I—I was thinking, my dear, that you—you are growing up to be a woman now, and perhaps you'll be getting tired of your old Guardy.

MINNIE (*warmly*). Tired of you, Guardy? Never! Why, I owe everything I have to you! What would have become of me if you hadn't taken pity on the poor little orphan girl, and brought her up as your own? I should have been a beggar! I should have starved, perhaps.

VICAR. Well, then, if you aren't tired of your old Guardy, I—I thought perhaps you'd be wanting another sort of Guardy. Eh?

MINNIE (*aside*). He's afraid I shall get married and run away from him! And he was actually crying about it! Poor old Guardy! I'll make him easy on that score! (*aloud*) Then you are a very—very foolish Guardy, if you think that. I shall never want another Guardy, or another home.

VICAR. Never? Are you sure?

MINNIE. Quite, quite sure, so far as one can see. You are my home, the only home I have ever known, and why should I leave you?

VICAR. And can you make me your home, Minnie—your home, your guardian, your—your—your—husband all in one?

MINNIE. Husband!

VICAR (*seizing her hands, very earnestly*). Yes, dear, I know you'll think me an old fool who ought to have known better—but—but I love you so dearly. I—I can't tell you how I have grown to love you. Tell me, Minnie, will you—can you be my wife?

MINNIE. Your wife?

VICAR. Yes, dear. Ah, I see, I have been mistaken. Well, forget all about it, forget all about it. I see, you—you don't love me.

MINNIE. Oh, yes, yes—indeed I do, Guardy—but it has come so suddenly, I hardly know what to say.

VICAR. Never mind me, dear, don't think of me. I only want to see you happy. I have no other wish in the world. I would rather cut off my right hand than see you miserable.

MINNIE. Dear Guardy, I'm sure you would!

During the next speech Perry opens the door at back, is coming in, sees them closely engaged, steps back, almost shuts door, peeps and listens through aperture.

VICAR. But I'd—I'd try very hard to make you happy, Minnie, if—if you can put up with an old fellow like me. And I can love you as no young fellow could love you. At five-and-twenty a young man doesn't know his own mind. He might love you to-day and forget you to-morrow, but I shall never forget you, Minnie. You are in my thoughts day and night, you are my one little lamb, and I have only you in the world.

MINNIE (*very quietly and resignedly*). Dear, dear Guardy, I love you very, very much, and I shall think it a great honour and happiness to be your wife.

VICAR. Thank you, my dear, thank you very much! How can I ever repay you?

MINNIE. In becoming my dear good husband.

Vicar is about to embrace her, and has half put his arm round her neck, when Perry makes a very obstrusive cough and enters. They step back from each other, look very guilty, and try to appear as if nothing had happened.

PERRY. I've took Granny Lomath her bottle of "forty-seving," and I've jest this very momint come back. (*aside*) Nice little game going on here while my back's turned, I can see. She's a hartful young hussy, she is—first with young Dick and now with the master. I'm high disgusted! (*busies himself at the sideboard.*)

VICAR (*getting the better of his confusion*). Ah yes, dear, and by the bye, I forgot to tell you I met Peters this morning—you know Peters, the rector of Harsham, and what do you think he told me? Such good news!

MINNIE (*listlessly*). What was it? Do tell me! (*watching Perry, aside*). That villain Perry has been listening to every word!

VICAR. You'll never guess! Why, my scapegrace nephew Dick—

MINNIE (*showing great interest*). Yes?

VICAR. Has turned over a new leaf—he's down at Harsham, restoring the church.

MINNIE (*half aside*). At Harsham! Only five miles away!

VICAR. Peters says he's making a great name for himself—wonders I hadn't heard of him. He's the rising man as an architect. Sir Gilbert has taken a great fancy to him!

MINNIE (*with a wretched attempt to look unconcerned*). I—I—I am so pleased—he was always a great anxiety to you, wasn't he? (*aside*) Oh, what have I done? What have I done?

VICAR. I dare say he'll be popping over to see us; if he does you'll receive him kindly, won't you?

MINNIE. Oh yes, indeed. He is your nephew.

VICAR. You mustn't remember what a scapegrace he has been. All that is past and done with. Eh?

MINNIE. Oh yes, past and done with!

VICAR. We must forget all about it!

MINNIE. Oh yes, forget all about it! (*aside*) Oh, Dick, if you love me still, if you ever loved me—for my sake keep away from this place—let me never see your face again!

Exit, door left.

VICAR (*briskly*). Well, Perry, what did Granny Lomath say to the bottle of "forty-seven"?

PERRY. Well, you see, as she ain't acclimatized to it, I looks upon it myself as so much good stuff throwed down the gutter!

VICAR. Never mind that, if she enjoyed it. But perhaps you didn't wait while she opened it.

PERRY. I took my corkscrew with me and hopened it for her myself. And she says to me, "Mr. Perry, you'll help yourself to a glass, won't you?" she says. And I says, "No, Mrs. Lomath; the vicar sent that port wine for you," I says, "and I wouldn't touch a spoonful of it for the whole world," I says. "Law," she says, "Mr. Perry, there's no occasion for the vicar to know anything about it." I says to her, "Mrs. Lomath," (*very severely*) I says, "when the vicar sends me with port wine to a party, that party haves that port wine, no matter what a hugly old varmint that party may be," I says, "I never have been in the habit of helping myself unbeknown to the vicar," I says, "and I won't begin it now to please you nor nobody," I says. And I come away himmediate. (*Bustles himself at sideboard.*)

While he is speaking enter Dick Capel from door at back, and comes down stage behind vicar.

DICK. Uncle!

VICAR. Dick, my boy! (*they greet cordially.*)

DICK. I've come back you see, like the bad penny!

VICAR. That's right! That's right! I knew you'd give us a look in. Oh, I've heard all about you. Peters has told me. Well, my boy, sit down, sit down, you're welcome. Perry, take Mr. Dick's hat and gloves, and tell Mrs. Marks to get luncheon for three.

DICK (*aside*). Three! Then she is still here!

Perry comes forward, takes Dick's hat and gloves.

PERRY (*aside as he is going out left—the vicar and Dick chit apart*). Young Dick back! Just in time to save master from making a tomfool of hisself with that young hussy. Pretty state of things for us to have a mess of squalling brats in this here vicarage at our time of life. I ain't got common patience with it. And if master ain't got more sense—I have—and I'll put a spoke in his wheel, as sure as my name's Jeremiah Perry.

Exit Perry, left, with Dick's hat and gloves.

DICK. First of all there's a little matter of business between us (*taking out a check-book—sitting at table*). I should be ashamed to show my face in your house if I couldn't pay you, to the last penny, the money I so disgracefully took from you!

VICAR. "Borrowed"—my dear boy, you were quite welcome—say "borrowed."

DICK. I say "robbed"—and a most dastardly robbery it was—you had been more than a father to me, and how did I repay you?

VICAR. Tut! Tut! Forget all about it as I have done!

DICK. But you were too kind to me—yes, you were—

kinder than you could afford to be, with all your numerous pensioners; for everybody knows that your private purse is public property in this parish.

VICAR. Just so! Just so! And you made use of it, that's all. Quite right, Dick, quite right!

DICK. I was a cowardly rascal.

VICAR. My boy, I have forgiven you long ago.

DICK. Yes, but I can't forgive *myself*!

VICAR. Say no more—say no more—"Who with repentance is not satisfied, is not of heaven or earth."

DICK. However, it is some slight comfort to me that I'm able to repay you, interest and all. See, I've started a banking-account and cheque-book. That looks like solid respectability, doesn't it? (*writing*) Three-hundred and eighty-five pounds seventeen and six. (*rising, giving check to vicar*) There!

VICAR. (*taking it*). And *there!* (*tears check to fragments*). My boy, do you think I want your money? No! You can't pay me that way. But you're going to turn out a brave, noble, honourable man, Dick—yes, you are—I can see it—and *that's* all the payment I want—and *that's* all the payment I'll take!

DICK (*shaking him warmly by the hand*). You are too good to me! But I insist on paying the money. I daren't keep it. It burns me. I must get rid of it!

VICAR. Well, then, give it to some deserving charity.

DICK. I'll tell you what—you shall start a fund for restoring your church, and head the subscription list with this money!

VICAR (*horrified*). Restore my church?

DICK. Yes, I'm sure it wants restoring. It's crumbling to pieces—the buttresses are quite shaky!

VICAR. Perhaps so, perhaps so, Dick. But if you get tampering with the old church, it'll only tumble down on your heads. No, no, let it be, let it be; it has lasted a good many generations, and I dare say it'll last out mine! And if some day it must fall, let it fall by the hand of time, let it go naturally to decay—don't try to patch it up and make it neither new nor old—but when the time comes, set to work, you youngsters, and build a big new church of your own on new ground—and make it big enough and wide enough to hold all the parish—but let my old church be; let it be, I say!

DICK. It's a pity to let it go to ruin—a fine old Gothic building like that!

VICAR. Gothic? Ah, Dick, it wasn't the builders of our old churches who were Goths! You are the true Goths, you modern restorers!

DICK. Well, do as you please about your church, but at least let me rid myself of this hateful money.

VICAR. We'll talk about that by and by.—But come,

you've had a long walk—what shall it be, eh? Port, sherry, claret? I've got some of the old brown sherry left, the old brown sherry, you know.

DICK. Thanks. I'll wait till luncheon. (*aside*) He doesn't say anything about Minnie. (*aloud*) Miss Heritage is still with you, I suppose?

VICAR. Oh yes, Oh yes. (*aside*) Shall I tell him? I've a great mind I would (*chuckling to himself*).

DICK. Quite well, I hope?

VICAR. Oh, yes, quite well. (*Chuckling, boiling over with his secret, aside*) I'd tell him if I was sure he wouldn't laugh at me. (*aloud*) Oh yes, she's very well indeed—never saw her better (*chuckling at Dick, gives him a little poke in the ribs*).

DICK (*aside*). What on earth is he laughing at? Surely he can't have guessed our secret!

VICAR (*aside*). I won't tell him till we are at lunch. Then I'll drop down on him with a pleasant surprise (*chuckling*).

DICK (*aside*). I've a great mind to ask him for Minnie now—perhaps I'd better wait and see her first—she may have forgotten all about me. (*aloud*) I'm glad to hear Miss Heritage is quite well.

VICAR. Oh yes, in capital health and spirits (*laughing slightly at Dick*).

DICK. I dare say we shall have her company at luncheon.

VICAR. Oh yes, she'll be delighted to see you, delighted, eh? (*smirking*).

DICK (*aside*). Now what is the matter with him? Has Minnie told him of our engagement?

VICAR. Yes, we'll have a bit of luncheon, and then you shall see my new schools—and you'll stay to dinner of course. I'll give you a nice little dinner.

DICK. I'm sure you will. (*Aside*) Where can Minnie have got to?

All through this conversation the vicar is overflowing with chat and good humor. Dick is anxious and fidgety, casting about restless glances for Minnie.

VICAR. And I'll give you some of my old port, and what's more, I'll help you drink it. I'm drinking port again. Doctor doesn't know anything about it. He said to me, "You must not drink port—port is poison to your system—simply poison." "Nonsense, doctor," I said, "that won't do. If port wine had been poison, I should have been dead a good many years ago."

DICK. But how do you reconcile port wine and gout?

VICAR. I don't try to reconcile 'em. I take the port and let 'em fight it out between 'em—and a pretty sharp tussle they have sometimes—in my big toe.

DICK (*aside*). What can be keeping her?

VICAR. Between you and me, I don't take much notice of what doctors say. Now I believe port wine is the very thing for gout.

DICK (*aside*). I wish I could let her know I'm here.

VICAR. It stirs it up, as you may say—gives it a thorough routing-out all through your system—and that's what you want—to rout it out.

DICK. Yes, rout it out, of course; rout it out—that's what you want.

VICAR (*prosing*). Talking about port wine, I'll tell you a capital joke I had about six months ago—sit down, my boy—sit down—make yourself at home (*they sit*).

DICK (*with a despairing gesture, aside*). Dear old fellow! Now he's started upon his jokes, I'm booked for an hour.

VICAR. Let me see, where had I got to?

DICK. You'd got to the port wine and "rout it out."

VICAR. So I will, my boy, so I will—I'll "rout it out" by and by—yes, yes; Perry shall "rout it out."

DICK. Perry is still with you, I see.

VICAR. Yes, oh yes. You know Perry makes a capital custodian of the port—he is so crusty (*emphasizing his joke and laughing at it*).

DICK (*attempting a laugh*). Very good! Very good! (*Aside*) I shall never get through this port.

VICAR. But I was telling you about my joke.

DICK. Yes, you were just coming to the interesting part.

VICAR. Yes; well, you see, what I'm going to tell you happened six months ago.

DICK. Oh, as recently as that! (*aside*). If he keeps on a little longer—it'll be a twelvemonth.

VICAR. Yes, and some of my parishioners had been trying to get up a total abstinence society, or something of the sort.

DICK. Indeed!

VICAR. And they asked me to call a meeting and take the chair—which I did. Well, the night came, and the school-room was crammed. There were about a dozen speakers, so we limited each speaker to ten minutes.

DICK (*cordially*). That's what I call a very capital rule. How did it end?

VICAR. They unanimously voted that the village didn't stand in need of a total abstinence society.

DICK. Capital! Capital! I think I'll just step upstairs and brush the dust off, after my walk (*rising*).

VICAR. Do! Do! You'll find your old room ready. And Perry shall bring in luncheon the while.

DICK (*aside*). I'll find her if she's in the house. (*Looking at vicar*) Dear old chap! He hasn't changed a bit—full of good-nature and kindness to everybody—and as fond of a joke as ever he was.
Exit Dick, left.

VICAR. I wonder where Minnie has hidden herself? She's rather shy, no doubt—run away to her room to think it over, I dare say. I must have her down to lunch to meet Dick—yes, yes—dear girl—and to think she loved me all the while—an old, middle-aged, rusty fogey like me! What a surprise it'll be to Dick. We'll have a bit of fun over it at lunch (*ringing bell*). How she will blush when I introduce her as my bride-elect. Aye, aye, how she will blush—and—how proud I shall feel! (*Enter Perry, left*). Oh, Perry, we'll have lunch a little earlier than usual, as Mr. Dick's hungry. Hurry it on, will you?

PERRY. Yes, sir. (*Going—turning round at door*). I suppose, sir, we shall have the old game on in this here vicarage, now Mr. Dick's back again.

VICAR. The old game? What old game?

PERRY. Between him and Miss Minnie.

VICAR (*a little startled*). Between him and Miss Minnie?

PERRY. Yes, sir. What, haven't you noticed how drefful spoony they two allays was on one another?

VICAR. No—no, Perry—I—I—I haven't noticed anything particular.

PERRY. Well now, that do strike me as peculiar, as you haven't never noticed that. I can't think where some folks's eyes are—in the smalls of their backs, I think, for they never sees nothing.

VICAR (*showing great interest*). Tell me—Perry—tell me all about it.

PERRY. Oh, it don't matter to me, you know; it ain't no business of mine (*going*).

VICAR. Wait a minute, Perry, don't go—I—I—I am very much interested of course in anything that concerns my—my nephew.

PERRY. Which it's nothing but nature as you should be—in course.

VICAR. You—you think he's fond of Miss Heritage?

PERRY. I never thinks—I'm allays certing sure of what I brings forrard in the course of conversation.

VICAR. And—and—and do you think *she's* fond of him, Perry? Do you think she's *very* fond of him? Eh? Eh? Is she *very* fond of him? (*very eagerly*).

PERRY. Well, I should rather say she were. She's allays bringing his name up when she's talking confidential with me—and before he went away, they was allays spooning round one another, and making fools of themselves, kissing and hugging till it was puffedly sickening to go into the room where they was; especially to anybody like myself as has been brought up with a proper sense of indecency.

VICAR. You—you—you never happened to overhear them say that they were fond of one another, I suppose.

PERRY. Well, I dessay if I'd been in the habit of listening, which is a thing I scorn, I might heard 'em say so hundreds of times—but not being in the habit of listening I can't say as I heard 'em say so more than about six times—more or less—and then it was quite by accident as I was forced to listen.

VICAR (*trying hard to preserve his composure*). Ah—all right, Perry,—you—you see Dick's my only nephew—and—and—it's taken me a little by surprise.

PERRY (*aside*). Old fool! He ought to have kep' his eyes open.

VICAR (*turning away his head from Perry*). Get the lunch, Perry.

PERRY. Yes, sir (*observing the vicar*).

VICAR (*angrily*). Get the lunch, do you hear? Get the lunch, and don't stand staring at me.

PERRY (*aside*). I've hit him 'ard, I have. *Exit left.*

VICAR (*pulling from pocket the piece of paper on which Minnie had written*). Mrs. Richard Capel! Richard Capel—then this means Dick and not me—and it's Dick she loves and not me—not me—not me! But let me think—she said she loved me—and she promised to be my wife—promised—and I'll make her very happy—oh yes, she shall be as happy as the days are long—when she's my wife I'll—I'll be so fond of her—she shall never miss Dick—I'll send him away—he's young and handsome and can choose his wife amongst a thousand—but I have only her. He wouldn't be so cruel as to take her away from me—when she's mine at last—Minnie, my Minnie, my little girl that's grown into my heart—My Minnie—No, not mine—I won't force myself on her—she shall be quite free—perhaps Perry may be mistaken—perhaps she does love me after all (*looking out upon garden*). They're in the garden—Dick and she—They're coming here!—I'll—I'll pop in somewhere—(*going to door right*). I must hear the truth—I must know one way or the other. (*goes into pantry, door right*).

(*Enter Dick and Minnie at door back, Dick savage and sullen, biting his lip, Minnie tearful and deprecating.*)

DICK (*looking around*). No, he is not here, but when I see him I will tell him plainly how the matter stands (*seats himself sullenly*).

MINNIE. No, Dick, no, for my sake you will spare him; you will keep my secret and go away.

DICK. And leave you to marry a man you do not love—

MINNIE. But I do love him, very much—very much.

DICK. Pooh! you know what I mean—you do not love him as a woman should love the man she marries.

MINNIE. I love him enough to make him a good, true wife—if you will only keep out of my path.

DICK. And as long as I keep out of your path, you don't care what becomes of me!

MINNIE. Oh, Dick, how can you say so!?

DICK. Listen to me, Minnie. When I left here two years ago it was with your promise—

MINNIE. I promised you nothing!

DICK. Well, it was tacitly understood between us, that if I worked my way to reputation and fortune you would become my wife. With that idea I went away—I had been a gay, reckless, harum-scarum fellow, who cared for nothing and nobody—I became a changed man—

MINNIE. Indeed, you are changed. You have become very hard and bitter.

DICK. The world makes a man hard and bitter! I settled down into harness—I worked at my profession day and night like a galley slave! I took no thought for rest, for pleasure, for anything except redeeming the past, and winning you. And when I come to you and tell you, "I have won back my good name; I have won a fortune and a future and I claim you to share it," you say, "Oh, I'm very sorry, Dick—really you must excuse me—I've only this morning promised your uncle to be his wife!"

MINNIE (*seating herself very quietly*). Yes, I have promised him, and I will keep my promise, whatever comes. For myself I don't care at all—I do care for you, and for him—but my duty is first to him, and I won't sacrifice him to my love for you!

DICK. Then what will become of me? You say you do care a little for me still. I suppose you don't want to see me going straight to the dogs?

MINNIE. Oh, Dick! you wouldn't do that?

DICK. What's to hinder me?

MINNIE (*rising*). What's to hinder you? You a man, and talk like this! What's to hinder you from going to the dogs? Why, everything! Your self-respect, your future, your profession, your manhood! If these won't keep you, neither would your love for me. Are you to wreck your life because you've lost a girl's love? No, no; be more manly!

DICK. Ah, if you cared for me as I care for you, you wouldn't give me up so easily.

MINNIE. Don't say that, Dick. You know, you know that I would give up my life for you, but I dare not break my faith. Dick, Dick, Dick (*very tenderly and appealingly—going up to him, laying her hand upon his sleeve*), because you love me, because I love you, you will not ask me to do this. Think of what he has been to you and me—think of all he has done for us—think how much we both owe to him! Could any father have been kinder to us? Then tell me, if there are such things as duty, and gratitude, and honour in this world—

and if they don't mean doing exactly what pleases one's self—tell me, am I to break my promise to him? Am I to break his heart for your sake? Tell me, Dick, as you love me, would you have me do it?

DICK (*rising warmly*). No, no, you shall not do it. You are right, Minnie; there are such things as duty, and gratitude, and honour in this world, and I will put them first! I will go away after lunch and never see you again!

MINNIE. My brave Dick! My brave Dick! There are a thousand things to keep you from going to the dogs! There's your profession!

DICK (*moodily*). Yes, I suppose that will have to be my mistress now!

MINNIE. Yes, and when people talk of the rising young architect, I shall be so proud to hear of your success! (*looking at him with enthusiasm*).

DICK. Don't look at me like that, or you'll make me break my vow! Come into the garden, and pluck me a rose from the old tree! Come, come, one rose to remember you by, when I have lost you for ever.

Exit Dick and Minnie at back.

Vicar totters in from door right.

VICAR. It's all gone!—all gone!—I shall never have her for my wife—never hold her in my arms—never—never—never (*drops into chair—spreads his arms on table—buries his face in hands—sobs*).

Music—a short pause—enter Perry from left with luncheon tray—sets it on table. Dick enters from back with a rose in his coat.

DICK (*to Perry, noticing the vicar*). Oh, Mr. Capel has come in, Perry.

PERRY. Yes, Mister Dick. I expect he have dropped off asleep again—that's how he does—he comes in, squats himself down, and off he goes the very next moment—and most generally he snores fit to split his nozzle! (*touching Vicar*). Beg parding, sir—want to lay the luncheon, sir.

VICAR (*as if rousing himself from sleep*). Oh! Ah! Perry! All right! (*Yawns, stretches himself and turns to Dick with a somewhat exaggerated assumption of his usual brisk cheerful manner. Perry goes on laying luncheon*).

VICAR (*looking at rose in Dick's coat*). Oh! Oh! Oh! I can guess what's up! (*laughing slyly at Dick; poking him in the ribs*). Well, well! Did Minnie tell you of my little joke with her, eh?

DICK. Your joke! No!

VICAR. Oh, I've had such a rare bit of fun with her this morning—you'll die with laughing when I tell you about it—such a lark! Ho! ho! ho! He! he! he!

DICK. What was it?

VICAR. Oh, I'll tell you when she comes in—Ho! ho! ho! He! he! he!—The best joke I ever had! (*turning to Perry*). Perry, we shall want some of the old port up for dinner to-day. I may as well tell you now, and then you can get it decanted. (*to Dick*) I'll give you a treat to-night, my boy! (*Perry looks alarmed.*)

DICK. Oh, I can drink anything. (*aside*) I wish he'd explain this joke of his.

VICAR. Yes, yes, but you're my prodigal son—and you've come back safe and sound, and I must kill my fatted calf—that is, I mean, I must let you taste my port! (*Perry gets more alarmed.*) I'll give you a sip of the famous "eighteen-eleven!"

PERRY. I don't know whether you're aware of it, but there's only three bottles of that "eighteen-eleven" left—and if you go drinking it up, why, it stands to reason we shall have none left.

Dick has gone up to window and is looking out.

VICAR. Only three bottles—why, there were six the last time I looked, and I've had none since!

PERRY. I happened to be down in the cellar the other day and I was only just that momint looking at them six bottles and thinking what a pity it was there was only six, and I was counting of 'em over to see as they was all right, when my eye running over 'em casual like happened to catch sight of a bad cork in one of 'em—and when I come to look into the corks I found as there was three bad corks out of the six—so in course the wine had all turned bad in them three bottles and I was obliged to throw it away.

VICAR. That was a great pity!

PERRY. That was jest what I thinks to myself—thinks I, "this here's a awful waste of 'eighteen-eleven,' but here goes!" and I emptied it down the sink-hole.

VICAR. I hope we shan't have any more bad corks!

PERRY. I hope we shan't, but I shouldn't like to promise you. And the wust of it is, the "forty-seving" corks is going jest the same way—awful rotting lot of corks in that "forty-seving" to be sure—I've had a dozen of 'em go bad jest this last few weeks as you may say.

VICAR. Dear! Dear! Perry, that wine must be seen to!

PERRY. That's jest what I said to myself—"If this ain't stopped," I says, "we shall soon have no wine left."

Exit Perry right—Minnie has entered at back.

VICAR. Come, come, sit down, you two, sit down. We'll have lunch, and then I'll tell you about my joke—come, come.

They sit—vicar at head of table—Minnie and Dick one at each side.

VICAR (*carving, laughing, and chuckling at them*). You know, Dick, I met Old Peters at Harsham this morning—and—and—he told me you'd be coming over to see me—and—and—so what do you think I did? Such a joke! You'll never guess! Ho! Ho! Ho! He! He! He!

MINNIE (*aside*). A joke!

DICK. What was it?

VICAR. Well, I had always noticed how fond you and Minnie were of each other—

MINNIE. Had you?

DICK. You had noticed it?

VICAR. Yes. Why I've always reckoned upon your making a match of it, you two—yes, yes—well I thought I'd have a bit of fun with Minnie here and—and—and—(*bursting with laughter*) so, so what do you think I did? I thought I'd try and cut you out—just by way of a joke—don't you see?—so I made her an offer and she accepted me—just—just by way of a joke—don't you see? Ho! Ho! Ho! He! He! He!

MINNIE. Oh, you dear old Guardy! Did you only mean it for a joke?

VICAR. Why, what else could you take it for? The idea of an old buffer like me—marrying a sprightly young girl like you! Ho! Ho! That would be a joke—eh, Dick?

DICK. Ha! Ha! Very good!

VICAR. Ho! Ho! Well. Take her, Dick—take her and my blessing upon both of you.

DICK (*grasping his hand*). My dear Uncle! You have been too good to me!

MINNIE (*rising from her place, kissing him*). My dear old Guardy! But, how did you come to know about Dick and me?

DICK. Yes, how did you find out our secret?

VICAR. Why, I've known it from the first—I—I—think I must have known it as soon as you knew it yourselves—yes, yes. Oh, I'm not blind.

Perry has entered with sherry—as he stood in the doorway he might be observed to wipe his lips before entering—he comes forward and pours the wine in their glasses.

VICAR (*drinking*). Well, my dear Dick, and my dear Minnie, I wish you both every happiness!

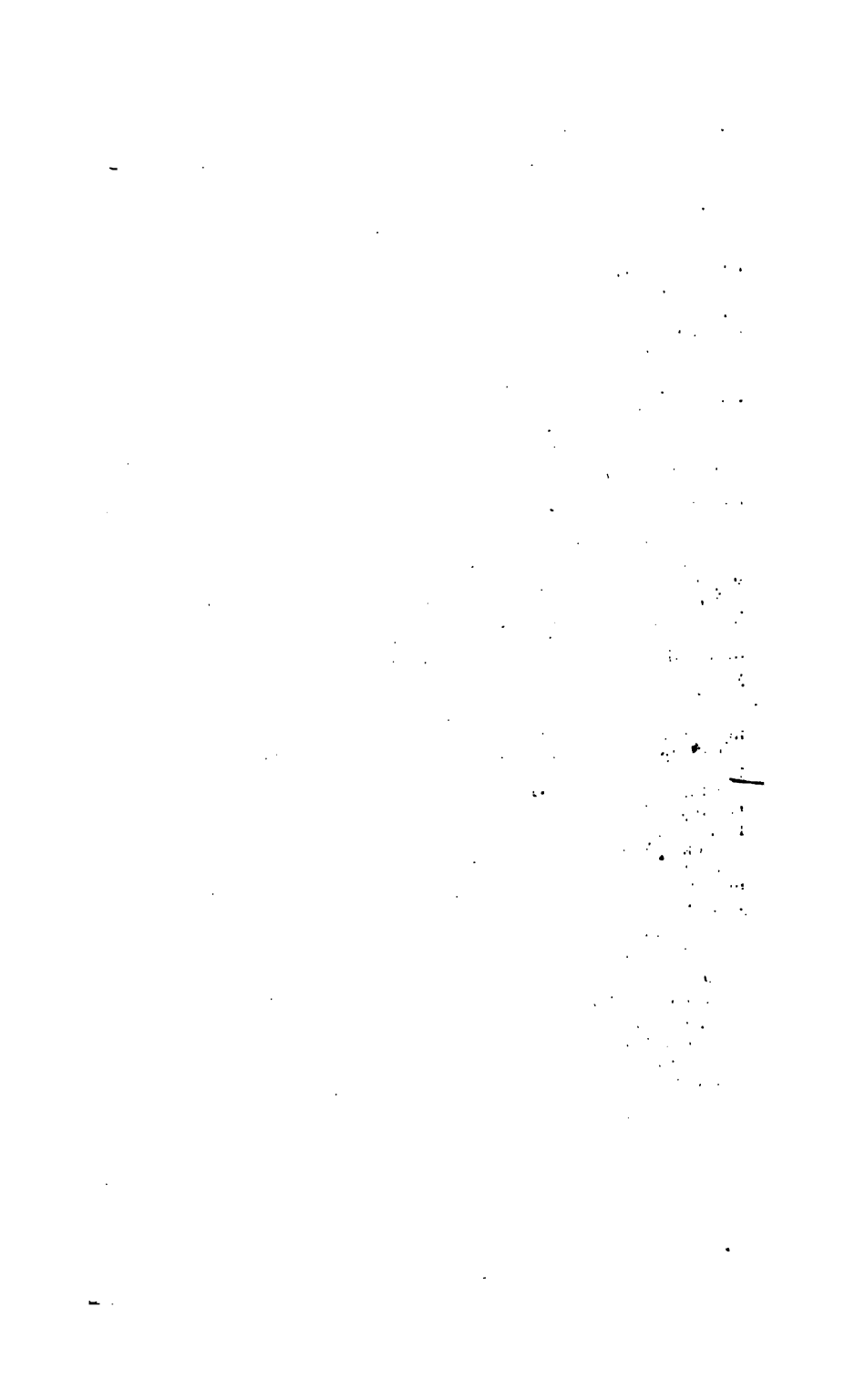
DICK. Thank you, Uncle.

MINNIE. Thank you, dear, dear old Guardy.

VICAR. God bless the future Mr. and Mrs. Capel!

(joining their hands).

CURTAIN.



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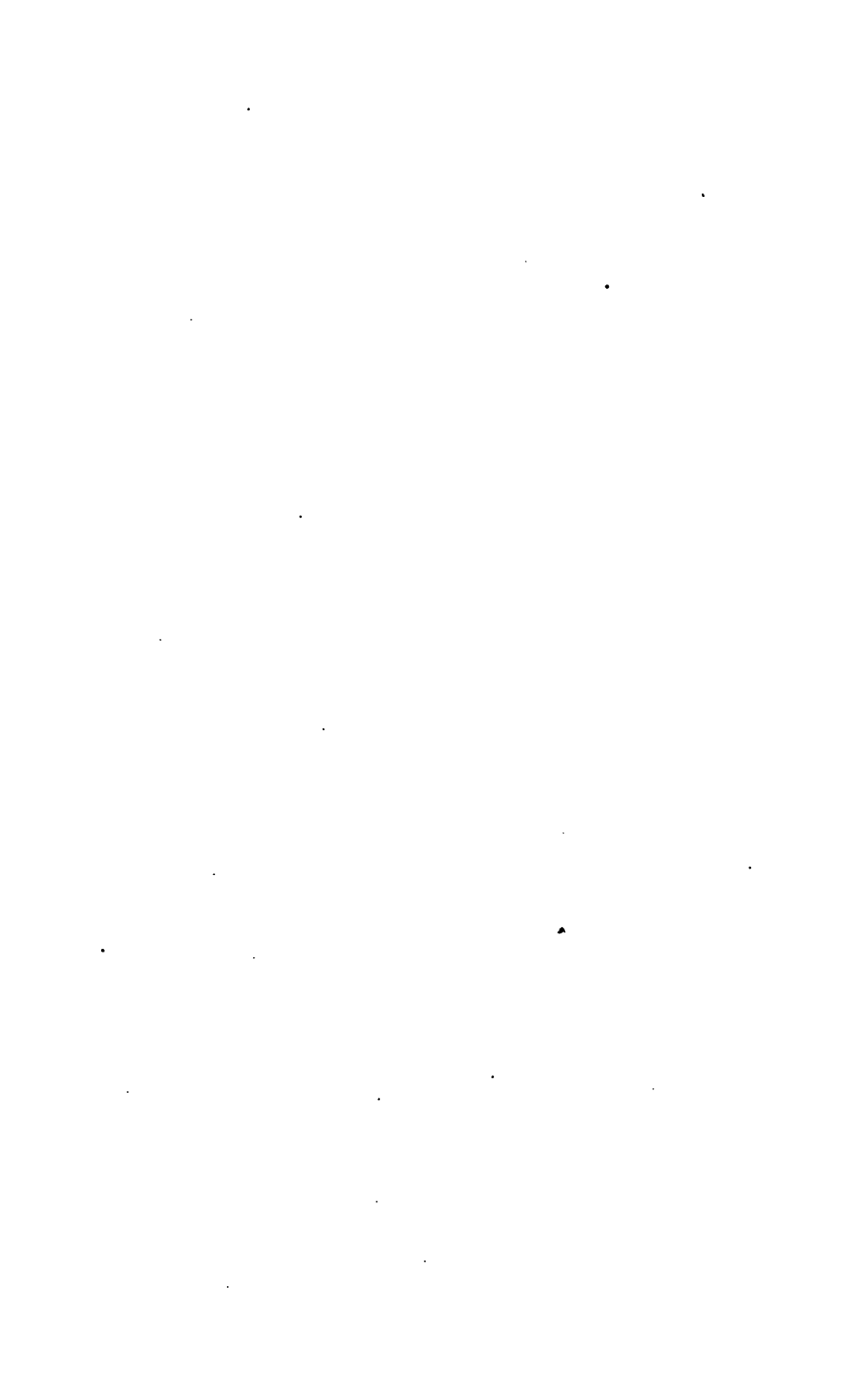
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